

PSIWORLD 2012

Pre-university Teachers' Professional Satisfaction

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Abstract

The professional satisfaction level could be determined by different variables: salary, promotion criteria, working conditions, appreciation, colleagues, school policy etc. and could be presented as a complex phenomenon with many connotations for school actors. The objective of the actual study is to analyze professional satisfaction level of teachers from pre-university level and demonstrate the necessity to increase teacher satisfaction level in order to render the professional performances more efficient.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of PSIWORLD 2012

Key words: professional satisfaction level, professional results;

1. Introduction

In Romania, society's bureaucratization, as a result of institutions' need to increase the efficiency of activities has also influences on school's staff, environment and management. The increasing number of procedures and methodologies – meant to control the employers and the quality of the services they are offering – is limiting teachers' liberty and transfer the responsibilities from high level to inferior level of staff. So, new standards and competences specified in procedures and methodologies transform the teacher in an “Olympic” participant to the bureaucratic marathon of educational system. Focus on pupil (on his interests, aptitudes, expectations) is overwhelmed by focus on criteria (evaluation, research, continuity on his job, promoting). This situation determine that teacher roles and responsibilities to be more complex: starting from didactic information (selecting, personalising, contextualising, optimally using etc.) and motivating pupils to involve in learning activities, to meeting professional standards / criteria (necessarily for keeping their job or being promoted). In this context – of permanent changing regulations, procedures and methodologies – we become interested about the professional satisfaction level of teachers concerning their job. More, our concern is starting from the premise

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that job satisfaction represents an essential aspect of teacher activity with important consequences both on personal and professional life.

Job satisfaction could be defined as positive emotional estate which results from personal opinion of an employee concerning his work and working climate. G. Johns consider job satisfaction “a collection of attitudes that people have about their job” [1]. Work satisfaction could be analyzed through different variables: salary, promotion, appreciation, working conditions, working colleagues, organization policy [1, p. 186]. So, as specialty literature mention, teacher’s attitude – often determined by professional satisfaction – could be very important for instructional – educational process because, if the teacher is satisfied about his job, he could make performance in his work.

2. Research and studies on this topic

Scheineider [1985, cited in 2, 1996] demonstrated that there is a direct link between *work performance* and *work dissatisfaction*. He demonstrated that in the sample of employees which feel dissatisfaction for their work, most of them accuse fatigue symptoms – physical and psychological – and absenteeism. In other research described in specialty literature, Savery [1989, cited in 2, 1996] have demonstrated that employees with low satisfaction in their work have a bad health, use to drink and smoke more, manifest a bigger incidence of diseases determined by stress, have more absences and ask for more vacation. Employees with a negative attitude toward their work represent a threat for organization because of a possible negative influence on their colleagues [1, p. 187]. In accord with G. Johns [cited in 2] we consider that some people have a predisposition, because of their personality, to be more or less satisfied about their work, although there are similar conditions for all. So, one side, there are people which, independent of working conditions, get attached to their job, finding a vocation in their profession, declaring that are professionally satisfied, and, on the other side, there are people that never get the feeling that are doing what they like to do.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. General aim of present research

Our study proposed to investigate the factors that influence pre-university teachers’ professional satisfaction (dissatisfaction) in order to propose solutions for improving this issue. We were interested to get information about school policy and interpersonal relations, teachers’ opinion concerning the correlation between salary financial satisfaction and didactic activity motivation, or teachers’ attitude toward the educational policy’s instability etc.. We have involved 30 pre-university teachers from urban schools (Prahova County): 28 women and 2 men with various experiences in educational field (from 2 to 35 years), with different qualification (from debutant to first didactic degree; from kindergarten to high school, and various specializations).

3.2. Research Methods

As our study was an investigative one, we have considered that the most appropriate methods for us are *focus – group interview* and *documents’ analysis* (legislative documents, curricula documents, job description etc.).

3.3. Research Organization Procedure and Participants

Developed during 2011 – 2012, was a qualitative one. All participants were informed about our study’s purpose and they have been consulted about their agreement to participate. First, we have analysed the new Romanian Education Law (2011) which proposed a lot of methodological changes – starting from education

levels organization, decentralization etc. to the newest issues concerning Didactic Personnel' Status (conditions necessarily to obtain a job in education, salary and promoting conditions etc.). Also, we have analysed other documents present in our subjects' schools: school procedures, job description etc. Second, we have organized 3 focus-group interviews with our subjects (with heterogeneous groups – teachers with different qualifications).

4. The Analysis and Interpretation of the Research Results

4.1. Appreciation of professional merits and promoting in educational system

Concerning the financial satisfaction, all investigated teachers, no matter their qualifications, consider that the salary is too small, that it do motivate them enough, and is degrading for teacher status: "I believe that my salary is too small for the professionalism and implication level that I manifest in didactic activity." (teacher for secondary school, first didactic degree, 22 years experience in education). It's interesting that, although they are not financially motivated, teachers find satisfactions in teaching activity: "When you have vocation for didactic career, and the self-accomplishment need is the most important, then the financial aspects are not so important any longer" (teacher for primary school, second didactic degree, 17 years experience).

We noticed that this category of teachers have an important human quality – integrity – which help them to overwhelm the financial frustration and maintain them to the educational system animated by their noble mission and by the satisfaction which result from the relation with their pupils. J.C. Maxwell and J. Dornan [3, p. 31] consider that teacher's integrity represents "the fundament that supports many other qualities, like respect, dignity and trust. Integrity is developing by valuing the character more than money, people than things, job than power, principles than convenience, perspective than present moment."

Teachers' promotion procedure in educational system imposes them to pass some current and special inspections. Considering scholar inspection system, teachers' opinions are varying depending on didactic degree and experience in education field. Teachers with definitive degree and low experience in education (2 to 5 years) considers that scholar inspections are useful, constructive, "an opportunity to found new information" (teacher in kindergarten, definitive degree, 3 years old experience), "a maximal but useful intellectual effort" (teacher in primary school education, 5 years old experience) even if it "generates stress".

Teachers with first and second didactic degree, with a large experience in education (20 to 35 years) mention the supremacy of quantitative, bureaucratic aspects of scholar inspections, and the excessive accent on documents' control. More, the control is based on rules and procedures which tend to become more important than finalities (pupils' achievements): "The scholar inspector is interested more to analyse my documents and less to see the results, children's competences." (teacher in high school, first didactic degree, 23 years experience). We noticed that some teachers are minimising the role of a good planning for curriculum which suppose a carefully reading of formal documents (National Curriculum) in order to realize an efficient projection of learning units and lessons.

4.2. School Policy and interpersonal relationships

From teachers' answers during group interview on "school policy" issue and documents' analysis results that schools are following exactly the Education Minister policy; so, there is not a real autonomy in school policy (and this is not a policy that offer satisfaction for all school staff): "Our school policy is absent, it perfectly confound with the Education Minister's policy" (secondary school teacher, second didactic degree, 14 years experience). In general, for all investigated subjects, school policy means to respect internal regulations, to ensure discipline in school, to reduce absenteeism and violence, to participate with pupils to scholar competitions, to ensure programs for continuous training for teachers, to participate to conferences and symposiums, to create

educational partnerships with different institutions. And, often, the lack of financial support is an obstacle for teachers to get professionally competent (to participate to competitions, to conferences etc.)

Initially, interpersonal relationships are described by investigated subjects as “very good” or “good”, based on cooperation, respect, and support for / from pupils, parents, colleagues and managers. Then, some teachers are sadly declaring that “relationships with colleagues have deteriorated” (primary school teacher, second didactic degree, 17 years experience) and become “occasionally, short term relations” (high school teacher, first didactic degree, 23 years experience), “only professional and no friendship relations” (kindergarten teacher, definitive degree, 7 year experience).

Our subjects have noticed lately a changing relation between colleagues:

- “13 years ago, when I first came in that school, we have great relationships with all my colleagues. Now, professional relationships have deteriorated, colleagues become anxious about maintaining their job, are distant, suspicious, selfish, and even jealous” (secondary school teacher, second didactic degree, 13 years experience);
- “There are little groups of teachers in our school (colleagues with similar interests), we are not *a family* anymore; more serious is that there are teachers which ‘are reporting’ to the school principal everything they hear or talk with their colleagues” (primary school teacher, second didactic degree, 17 years experience).

The conclusion of many investigated teachers is that is better to be reserved and prudent in relationship with colleagues and to limit only to professional (and not friendship) relations. 25% of them have described their relations with school principal as bad, because, they said, “lately, the principal isolate himself in his office and communicate selectively with some teachers – only those which are on his ‘white’ list” (kindergarten teacher, first didactic degree, 35 years experience) and “principal does not have the capacity to value every teacher considering his performances” (primary school teacher, second didactic degree, 17 years experience). We could notice here that teachers become conscious about the principal’s role in teachers group cohesion.

4.3. Teaching activity and professional results

The most interesting results of our research refers to the financial and professional status satisfaction: all investigated teachers have told that even if they do not have appropriate financial, social and even professional appreciation, they learn to teach with pleasure, with love for children and profession: “I love to teach and my soul is happy when my pupils obtain good results. Every day teaching is a challenge for me to be competitive with myself for children’s well being.” (primary school teacher, first degree, 25 years experience); “Satisfaction for my job comes together with children’s joy when they came to kindergarten” (kindergarten teacher, definitive degree, 3 years experience).

Investigated teachers consider that the most significant professional results are actually children achievements, performances to scholar contests, and recently, successful integration in normal schools for children with special needs. Unfortunately, as many subjects have noticed, their professional results and their efforts are not correctly valued in school by pupils, parents, colleagues and principal: “My work, my efforts are not appreciated in school” (secondary school teacher, second degree, 14 years experience); “My professional merits are not appreciated by my colleagues or by principal; but what bothers me most is the lack of appreciation of parents” (kindergarten teacher, definitive degree, 5 years experience). More, teachers minimize the role of didactic planning (learning units planning, lessons planning) and consider it as an excessive bureaucracy: “Instead of being appreciated for my directly work, I am firstly appreciated for my documentation” (secondary school teacher, second degree, 14 years experience). Teachers are not completely conscious about the fact that didactic planning represents a condition for their success, an expression of their professional thinking and putting in practice of their pedagogical thinking. Didactic design consists in projecting a functional relation between finalities, content, time, and strategies.

We noticed that teachers with first didactic degree consider that their merits are partially recognised: “Sometimes my younger colleagues ask me to help them and I feel respected and appreciated as a professional” (primary school teacher, first degree, 15 years experience). Also, teachers are satisfied about their pupils’ appreciation: “when I met on the street a former pupil and he thanks me for the education that I offered him I am very happy.” Starting from A. Maslow theory about needs, we have noticed that social needs of teachers (respect and appreciation for their work) are not fully satisfied. So long as these needs are not satisfied, as A. Maslow said, going to development needs (knowledge or self-accomplishment) is blocked. If *social needs*’ satisfaction of didactic staff is depending on others (managers, colleagues, parents, students etc.), to satisfy superior needs is depending on individual autonomy. The more teachers are helped to satisfy their social needs (a deficiency need), the more they will want to satisfy as well their personal and professional raising needs. Unsatisfying social needs of teachers creates favourable premises for conflicts and deteriorate school climate.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The current study started from the aim to investigate the factors with influence on teachers’ satisfaction level in order to find possible solutions for improving this aspect, and indirectly to raise pupils’ achievement. So, we have found that the factors that have influence teachers’ satisfaction are firstly the pleasure of teaching (working with children and seeing results – pupils’ achievements and attitudes), and secondly being appreciated by superiors (during scholar inspections).

Starting from data analysis we noticed that teachers’ professional dissatisfaction is not due especially to their low financial motivation (salary and indirectly, low financial support that allow them to participate to scholar competitions and conferences), but to the fact that their colleagues, parents, managers do not appreciate their work. As a solution we propose to implement some managerial projects in schools that focus on personal and professional development of teachers, on raising managers’ confidence in teachers’ capacities and qualities, on making authentic school-family partnerships, on finding concrete modalities to recognize teachers’ merits in a transparent, objective manner by colleagues, parents and managers. School climate has changed, become more tensional, cold, and stressful. Relationships are mostly collegial and less friendship ones; these relationships are more reserved, more prudent, more suspicious and less opened, emphatic, trustful. It looks like their fear for losing their job, many criteria and difficult to accomplish negatively affect collegial relations and school atmosphere. In this atmosphere there is a possible danger: to educate children in the spirit of precaution, mistrusting people, with negative influence on their development. So, it is important that teachers to trust their colleagues in order to encourage and help pupils to become more confident in their own forces and more trustful in their relations with other pupils. “Instead of triggering suspicion and prudence, he will seek opportunities for collaboration, team working and mutual knowledge.” [4, p. 122]

In order to remediate these issues we propose to elaborate and implement training programs (as continuous education) addressed to teachers, program meant to develop their competences, skills and attitudes necessary for a successful education activity and, as our subjects suggested, these programs should be practical ones, based less on theoretical issues and more on competences development.

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